

C.J. Whitmore

The Bible in the Furnace

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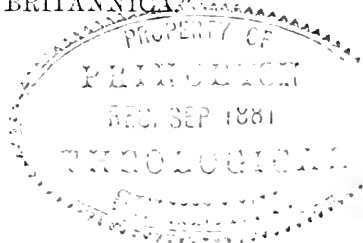


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THE BIBLE IN THE FURNACE.

A REVIEW OF PROF. W. R. SMITH'S ARTICLE "BIBLE"
IN THE "ENCYCLOPÆDIA BRITANNICA."



BY THE

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Division.....

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THE BIBLE IN THE FURNACE.*

A SHORT time before his death the late Dr Hamilton said in the Presbytery of London :—" We need not concern ourselves too much about attacks on, or defences of, the Bible. The attack is made, the defence follows, the Book goes on its way with sublime indifference to both. Sooner or later attack and defence are alike forgotten, but the Book is still found calmly pursuing its way. We should let this past experience of the failure of all attacks teach us to receive succeeding ones with calmness, in the full confidence that the God of the Scriptures is both able and willing to take care of his own." Bearing these wise words in mind we proceed to consider the article " Bible " in the " Encyclopædia Britannica," by Professor Smith, Free Church College, Aberdeen, wherein the believer in the authenticity and genuineness of the Scriptures, he who holds he has in the Bible an infallible guide through this world to a better beyond it, is brought to face another of the innumerable attacks on his faith, and is again called upon to investigate the truth and weight of the charges made.

The first cursory perusal of Professor Smith's article reveals its character—simply a resumé of destructive objections of the farthest advanced school of unbelievers in the inspiration

* "Encyclopædia Britannica." Article "Bible " by Professor W. Robertson Smith.

and authority of the Word of God. In the article all that is calculated to cause doubt and uneasiness in the minds of devout but unlearned Christians finds a ready place and a permanent record. It is plain that the article is founded upon the conclusions of French and English Deists of the last century, and German Rationalists of the present. The other side of the question—the replies that have been made to objections, the defences offered to attacks, the explanations of difficulties suggested—is almost completely ignored. How far this absolute one-sidedness on a most important subject is just or allowable in an encyclopædia is a topic that must be left for the reader's and publisher's consideration. Further consideration of Professor Smith's words reveals the fact that the whole article is written in a very confused style; totally different topics being mixed up together in a manner that renders it exceedingly difficult to follow the author's meaning, or to quote passages that will give a fair representation thereof. It is also exceedingly difficult to separate between the professor and the critics quoted, who in almost all cases are anonymous. Allowing for these drawbacks, enough remains to give full grounds for dissent and criticism of the most decided character. For these purposes the article may be divided into four parts:—
 1. The Pentateuch; II. Psalms; III. Prophets; IV. New Testament.

I.—THE PENTATEUCH.

Professor Smith says:—"There can be no reasonable doubt that the priests possessed written legal collections of greater or lesser extent, from the time of Moses downwards." Here is a clear admission of the existence of Moses, but whence obtained is left in the darkest mystery! If the books popularly supposed to be written by Moses are simply forgeries and frauds, what authority remains for believing in

his existence? It is universally admitted that all the other Scriptures are founded on the Pentateuch; if that is destroyed, all else must follow—New and Old Testament alike. Where, then, is the authority for believing in Moses apart from the incriminated history? Professor Smith does not admit that any portion of the Pentateuch was written by Moses, but it is urged as an objection to his authorship that critics have discovered signs of later date than the time of Moses. Professor Smith writes: "In its present shape the Pentateuch is certainly subsequent to the occupation, for it uses geographical names which arose after that time (Hebron, Dan); refers to the conquest as already accomplished (Deut. ii. 12; *cf.* Num. xv. 32; Gen. xii. 6); and even presupposes the existence of a kingship in Israel (Gen. xxxvi. 31)." These being the cases cited it may be taken they are the strongest the Professor is able to find in all the destructive school of criticism. Whence has he obtained them? and can they be fairly answered? The apparent derivation of the first and third of the cases is from Paine's "Age of Reason," pp. 32 and 39 (Holyoake's edition). Paine writes, page 32, 'There was no such place as Dan till many years after the death of Moses, and, consequently, that Moses could not be the writer of the book of Genesis, where the account of pursuing them unto Dan is given.' Bishop Watson's few words in reply to Paine cover the whole ground taken up by Professor Smith's objections—"A few verses in the book of Genesis could not be written by Moses, therefore no part of Genesis could be written by Moses. A child would deny your therefore."

Believers in the Mosaic authorship may inquire, How is it known these are interpolations, except by comparison with the main documents, which must be of an early age? The assertion of interpolation assumes the existence of an older narrative which has been interpolated. This was remarked

by Dr Graves long since. "If this were a compilation long subsequent to the events it records, such additions would not have been plainly distinguished, as they now are, from the main substance of the original."

But it may be questioned if any interpolation need be allowed. When was Kirjath-Arba *first* called Hebron? Moreover, the wording of Gen. xxiii. 2—"And Sarah died in Kirjath-Arba, the same is Hebron, *in the land of Canaan*," is strong proof that the writer was not in the land of Canaan, and we know that Moses did not enter the land. Was there no place or stream called Dan in the time of Abraham? It would be very hard to prove a negative. In the second case, "refers to the conquest as already accomplished." It is quite easy to suppose that Moses is here referring to the conquest of Sihon the Amorite and Og King of Bashan, events recorded in the previous history of the wanderings (see Num. xxi. 21-35), where the name Israel as the conqueror is repeatedly used.

The third case is also found in the "Age of Reason," p. 39, and in Voltaire's "Philosophical Dictionary," Vol. I., p. 544, who observes, "This is the celebrated passage which has proved one of the great stumbling-stones." "In fact these words could not have been written until after the time that the Jews had kings." Paine's words are, "The passage, therefore, that these are the kings that reigned in the land of Edom before there reigned any king over the children of Israel could only have been written after the first king began to reign over them, and consequently the book of Genesis, so far from having been written by Moses, could not have been written till the time of Saul at least; and if taken in a general sense, it carries itself through all the times of the Jewish monarchy." To which objection of Deists and Professor we may reply, is not Moses referring to his own earlier writing in Gen. xvii. 16, where he records the prophecy con-

cerning Sarah, "She shall be a mother of nations, *kings* of people shall be born of her?"

There are two other instances cited by Professor Smith, but not quoted in full, the first is Num. xv. 32. The assumption is that Moses could not have written the first part of the verse. But the application of the canon of interpretation—"compare scripture with scripture"—of which more must be said presently—supplies sufficient reason for believing the Mosaic authorship. Before the final revision of the Pentateuch by Moses, and its committal to the custody of the Levites, the wanderings had come to an end, the wilderness journeyings were completed; Moses had been warned of approaching death, and had made all needful preparation. (See Deut. xxxi. 24-30.) There is, therefore, no difficulty in believing that Moses added this instance in his final revision for the guidance of his successors.

The second instance not quoted in full is Gen. xii. 6. Dr Adam Clarke says here, "This is thought to be an interpolation, because it is supposed that these words must have been written after the Canaanites were expelled from the land by the Israelites under Joshua; but this by no means follows. All that Moses states is simply that at the time in which Abram passed through Sichem, the land was inhabited by the descendants of Canaan, which was a perfectly possible case, and involves neither contradiction nor absurdity. There is no rule of criticism by which these words can be produced as an evidence of interpolation or incorrectness in the statement of the sacred historian." Professor Smith assumes this passage as proving later date; but may it not as fairly be cited as evidence of an earlier document than the time of Moses? Had the sons of Canaan occupied this plain long before the time of Abraham? Why may not the Canaanite occupation of this particular spot have been a thing of recent date in the Abrahamic age, and therefore have a fitting, needed place in the narrative?

Other explanations might possibly be given, but the acceptance of these as sufficient disposes of all the instances adduced to show why Moses could not be the author of the Pentateuch.

From the pages of Voltaire and Paine these objections to the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch have been transferred to modern infidel works, published at a cheap rate, circulated far and wide among working men, who never see the explanations and replies; and the mischief done is incalculable. In a thoroughly infidel work, "The Bible and its Evidences," by Robert (not Thomas) Cooper, dated 1858, the signs of later date relied on by Professor Smith are set forth; the same conclusion adopted that the Book is long subsequent to Moses; and, it is added by Cooper, therefore the books are forgeries. In Bradlaugh's "Bible as it is," and "Freethinker's Text Book," the same theories lead to the same conclusions.

But let us inquire of Prof. Smith, "If Moses did not write the Pentateuch, who did?" In replying to this query the Professor takes all the advantage of the strictly anonymous. He espouses the Elohist and Jehovistic theory, adding a third author to account for all specialties. He speaks of "The priestly narrative of the Elohist, the prophetic delineation of the Jehovist, the more picturesque and popular story of the third author." (Does not the varied life of Moses fulfil these supposed conditions?) We are thus introduced to a priest, a prophet, and what is styled a layman, as the joint authors of the five books of Moses as heretofore believed. "But who were these—priest, prophet, layman?" Warned possibly by previous failures, perhaps remembering what befel the assertion of Samuel's authorship by Bishop Colenso, that to fulfil the conditions Samuel must have invented the name of his own great grandfather, and concerning Jeremiah's authorship of Deuteronomy, that he had not the Egyptian

knowledge displayed in the book ;—warned, perhaps by these and other acknowledged failures, Prof. Smith prefers the anonymous, and we are left in darkness that may be felt as to the personality of the conjectural priest, prophet, and layman that are to take the place of Moses.

But are the critics agreed as to the Jehovistic and Elohist theories ? Have they reached harmonious and agreeing conclusions ? Astruc, who is quoted by Prof. Smith, taught that the book of Genesis is made up of *twelve* memoirs or documents. Eichhorn asserted *two* pre-Mosaic documents, distinguished by Elohim and Jehovah. Ilgen supposes *seventeen* documents but only three authors, among whom he sometimes divides single verses. De Wette's theory is *one* continuous Elohist document to Ex. vi. In this the author inserted what he found in one or several Jehovistic records. Von Bohlen believes in the Elohist basis, but denies the existence of Jehovistic documents. Gramberg believes in three authors—the Elohist, the Jehovist, and a compiler who did what he pleased with his authorities. Ewald exhibits a variety of opinions. He began by holding the unity of Genesis, and proving it against both the document and fragmentary hypothesis. His arguments have not yet been refuted by himself or others. Hupfeldt takes three independent historic works—two Elohist, one Jehovistic, and a compiler in addition. Knobel believes in two documents and a compiler, who sometimes followed hints in the documents, sometimes popular tradition, sometimes his own conception. Disagreeing thus among themselves, which is the only one among them who *can* be right ? Why, *when* he is discovered, should we believe his theory in preference to the universal Scripture assertion of the Mosaic authorship ?

In opposition to the dicta of these contradictory critics, we briefly place here the evidence on which the Mosaic authority is received. Among heathen writers who speak of Moses are

Juvenal and Strabo, Diodorus Siculus (who places Moses first among the six famous lawgivers of the world), Tacitus, Artapanus, Eupolemus, and Manetho. Numenius asks, "What is Plato but Moses speaking in the Attic dialect?" Porphyry acknowledged Moses to be prior to Sanconiathon. The Jewish testimony that Moses was the author is universal. From the "Confession of Faith" of to-day, wherein the Jew avouches, "I firmly believe that the law (Torah-Pentateuch) which we have now in our hands was given by Moses," on through the Talmud to Philo and Josephus, thence through all the writers of the New Testament, to Onkelos, Jonathan, and to all that mention the subject in the Old Testament, the testimony is as clear as it can be, that Moses wrote the Pentateuch. In the New Testament alone there are ninety quotations from the Pentateuch. John the beloved disciple, Peter, on the day of Pentecost, and Paul, who last saw Jesus, declare positively that Moses was the writer, and, last and best of all, our Lord Himself, whose lightest word should settle such a question for ever, declares in many different instances that Moses wrote the Pentateuch. (See, for example, John v. 45-47.) We have thus, on one hand, the Prophets, the Lord Jesus, His apostles, Jews, Christians, Heathens of all ages. On the other, Voltaire, Paine, and anonymous critics, who, like Colenso, have drunk at their poisoned fountain. We would not associate with these the writer of the article under review; but a personal stranger may be permitted to express a fervent hope and breathe an earnest prayer that he may speedily leave his temporary place in the destructive ranks, and use his great talents on the side of history and truth at the feet of the Lord Jesus.

II.—THE PSALMS.

The Professor commences "by questioning the tradition contained in the titles, which ascribe seventy-three Psalms to

David, and beside him name as authors, Asaph, the sons of Korah, Solomon, Moses, Heman, Ethan." "Some titles are certainly wrong." "The assertion that no Psalm is certainly David's is hyper-sceptical, and few remains of ancient literature have an authorship so well attested as the 18th or even as the 7th Psalm." The old belief ascribed at least seventy-three Psalms to David; the new fashion extends his authorship only to two of these, and leaves the remaining seventy-one doubtful if not discredited. We are thus brought to the question, are we to believe the direct attestation of one part of God's word concerning the authorship of another part, or are we to throw such attestations aside as unreliable and worthless, by receiving the vague, unsupported, and contradictory opinions of what is styled "internal criticism?" Thus modern criticism, formulated by Professor Smith, allows no more than two Psalms as certainly written by David. The evidence of the New Testament is as divergent as possible. The 69th Psalm is affirmed by Peter to be David's (Acts i. 16, 20). Paul affirms the same thing (Rom. xi. 9, 10). Peter affirms the 2d Psalm (Acts iv. 25), the 16th Psalm (Acts ii. 25), and the 110th Psalm (Acts ii. 34), all to belong to David. Our Lord himself ascribes the 110th Psalm to David (Matt. xxii. 43). These must suffice as instances of Psalms quoted in the New Testament expressly affirmed there as David's, and often described and widely accepted as being of the class entitled Messianic, or prophetic of the Messiah. They are entitled to the gravest consideration as being quoted in the New Testament in support of the claims of the Lord Jesus Christ; and we cannot consent to doubt or discredit being cast upon their authorship on very slight grounds or no grounds at all.

How slight the grounds of rejection are, may be seen in the case of the 51st Psalm, of which Professor Smith observes, "Obviously composed during the desolation of the temple."

Hengstenberg holds the Davidic title to be authentic. Between these two critics—Professor Smith and Hengstenberg—who shall decide? We will call on some others. Dr Davidson says, “the beginning of the captivity;” Ewald, “after the destruction of the temple;” Olshausen, “the times of the Maccabees;” Hupfeldt, “after the Babylonish captivity.” Evidently the last two verses of the Psalm are the reasons for assigning later date. But may not David have written these also? He was engaged for many years in storing up wealth to carry out his plan of building the temple himself. Had no plan been revealed to him by the Spirit (1 Chron. xxviii. 12) which included Zion and reconstruction of the walls of Jerusalem? Might he not fear that murder and adultery would debar him from farther action, and so refer these matters back to God as he did in another case? Is it harder to believe thus than to believe all the ages to have been mistaken in the Davidic authorship of this much-loved Psalm? But decreasing space warns us that we must pass on to—

III.—THE PROPHETS.

Concerning the prophecy of Zechariah, Prof. Smith writes:—“We are surely entitled to let it speak for itself. When the principle is admitted other applications follow.” Certainly! Suppose we, regarding the Scriptures as one complete book, though composed of many parts, claim to allow it to speak for itself. It follows that the Pentateuch must be ascribed to Moses, a large number of Psalms to David, and that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God. Therefore Prof. Smith’s allegations of “inventions” in Job and Jonah, Esther being a “fiction” (why, then, do Jews now hold the feast of Purim?), are shown to be untenable. Prof. Smith’s theory concerning the Book of Isaiah is utterly demolished by the application of his canon of criticism to his theory. Of the Book of Isaiah he says, “In the period of exile more than one

anonymous prophet raised his voice ; for not only the ‘ Great Unnamed ’ of Isaiah xl.—lxvi., but the authors of other Babylonian prophecies are probably to be assigned to this time.” According to this theory the first thirty-nine chapters may have been written by Isaiah, but the remainder of the book must be credited to some “ Great Unnamed.” This is serious ground to occupy, for it is evident that the acceptance of this theory involves the rejection of the inspiration of the New Testament Scriptures. The first chapter disputed (40th) involves the credibility of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke who both clearly state (Matt. iii. 3 ; Luke iii. 4—6) that the words in Isaiah (xl. 3—5) are the words of Isaiah himself. Both evangelists affirm the same of other chapters. The case in John xii. 38—41, is still more crucial, for the evangelist speaks of the allowed portion in Isaiah vi. 9, 10 ; he quotes also one of the disallowed chapters (Isaiah liii. 1), and affirms that *both* were spoken by Isaiah and were uttered concerning the Lord Jesus. Luke is in the same position ; in the Acts (viii. 30, 32, 33), he ascribes Isaiah liii. 7, 8, to the Prophet by name. Paul asserts Isaiah to be the author of liii. and lxv. (see Rom. x. 16, 20, 21), and asserts also the Divine origin of Isaiah xlv. 23 (Rom. xiv. 11). These instances will suffice to show that if the theory of Prof. Smith is true—if Isaiah did not speak or write the last portion of the book ascribed to him—then no reliance whatever can be placed upon the writings of Matthew, Luke, John, and Paul. They are either deceivers or deceived, in either case unreliable. Prof. Smith gives no reason whatever for his belief in a “ Great Unnamed ” in place of Isaiah. We have the bare theory, not a shadow of evidence in support of it ; and consequently his reasons for so believing, cannot be submitted to investigation. Respecting the Book of Daniel, Prof. Smith is in a worse condition than the Jews of old. He has no place for it. They had it among the Prophets once—thence

removed it to the historical books ; the Professor has no place for it at all.

IV.—THE NEW TESTAMENT.

There is a most striking change apparent in Professor Smith's treatment of the New Testament as compared with his treatment of the older canon. In the latter case, only the most severe internal criticism is referred to as having any authority or weight ; but concerning the New Testament the value and weight of external evidence is by contrast freely admitted. And this class of evidence appears to be of a somewhat satisfactory character. He says : " Except in two or three cases (particularly that of 2d Peter), the external evidence in favour of the books is as strong as one can fairly expect even when not altogether decisive." " Towards the close of the second century, the four Gospels, the Acts, thirteen Epistles of Paul, the first Epistles of Peter and John, and the book of Revelation, were received in the most widely-separated churches with remarkable unanimity." If external evidence is to be received for the New Testament, why not for the Old ? It is allowed that Justin Martyr is a competent witness for the Gospel of John, why should we not accept the witness of John concerning Isaiah, Paul to David, Matthew to Moses ? On what principle can we accept the testimony of Justin and refuse that of John ? The only apparent explanation is that the testimony of the New Testament concerning the Old is so plain and clear that the critic's occupation would be gone.

One assertion of Professor Smith, on which much reasoning is based, seems to be a simple error. Speaking of the prologue to the third Gospel, he says : " It seems to be implied that if the eye-witnesses wrote at all, they, at least so far as was known to Luke, did not compose a regular narrative, but simply threw together a mass of reminiscences." This is in

direct antagonism to Luke's statement : "Forasmuch as many have taken in hand *to set forth in order* the things most surely believed among us." "It seemed good to me also . . . to write unto thee, in order." Luke does not speak of a "mass of reminiscences thrown together," but he uses the same description of the narratives alluded to as he applies to his own, and does not assume that his narrative will take the place or precedence of those already existing.

With respect to the Second Epistle of Peter, that letter and its critic are at direct variance. The letter asserts that it is the production of "Simon Peter, a Servant and an Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ." The critic casts great doubt upon this initial statement, and thus unavoidably stigmatises the whole letter as a base forgery and fraud. The writer states that he was an eye-witness of the Majesty of Jesus, and heard the voice of the excellent glory when with Him (Jesus) on the Holy Mount. This must be simple truth, or, viewed from a Christian standpoint, a falsehood of the most blasphemous character, besides being a cunningly-devised fable. Is it conceivable that any writer would assert this very thing, "We have not followed cunningly-devised fables," when the whole of his epistle was nothing more or less in itself? which must be the case if its author were not the apostle himself.

We have thus, as far as space would allow, passed in brief review the most salient points of Professor Smith's article, and, with a few words of summary, must close.

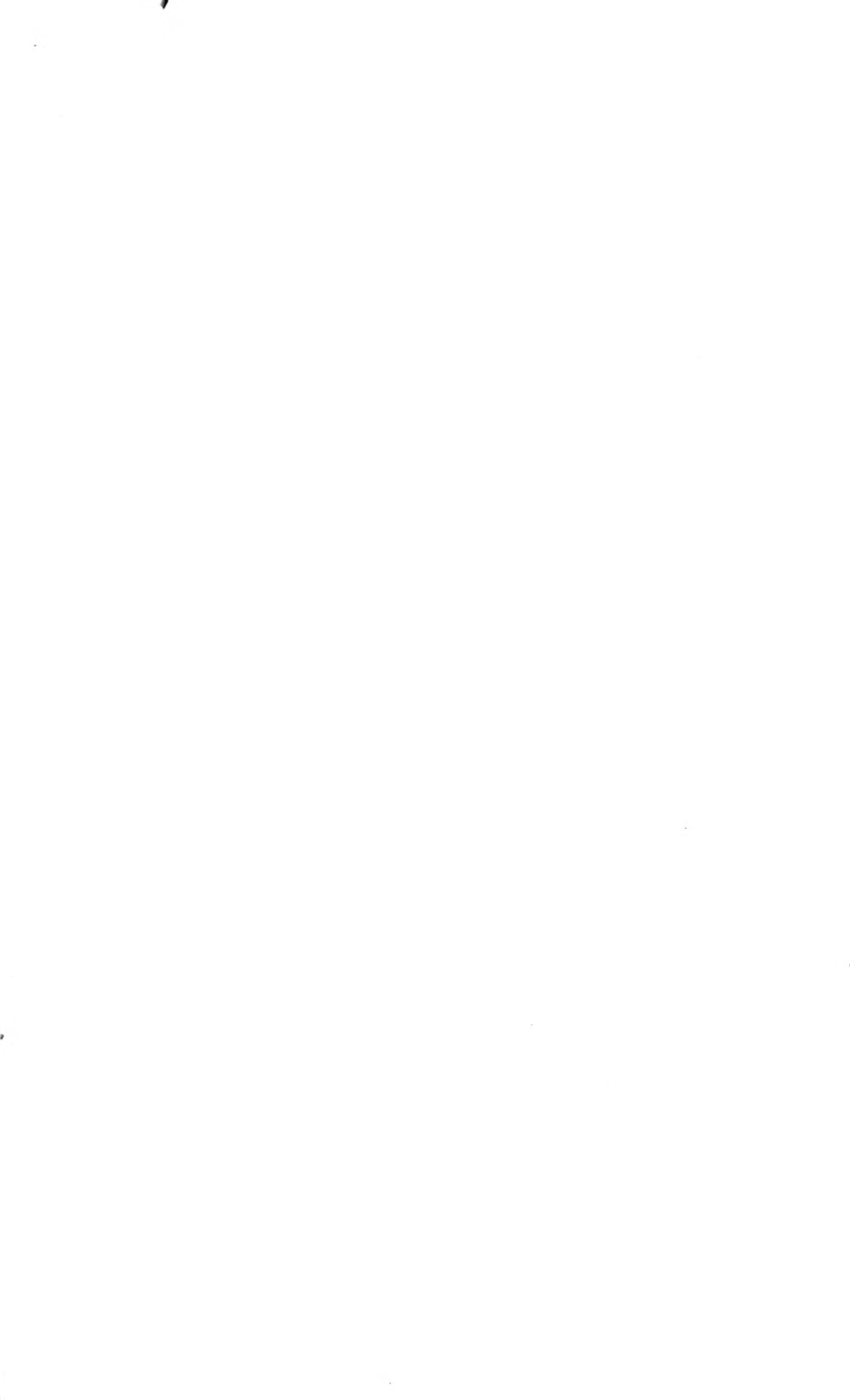
[If Professor Smith's article is accepted, there will be very little if any ground left for belief in the genuineness and authenticity of the Scriptures; certainly, what will remain will not be of much worth. There can be neither Jew nor Christian in the true sense of the words.] Moses was not the author of the Pentateuch, therefore all the writers who make that assertion were at least mistaken, and there is an end of

all idea of their inspiration and infallible guidance. The Lord of glory refers again and again to Moses as the writer of the Pentateuch; and we are thus compelled by Professor Smith to face the shocking conclusion that He whom we love and reverence as the Son of God, and "the Truth," was also either deceiving or deceived, and in either case not the Divine Teacher and Master we hold Him to be. The case is precisely similar with regard to the Psalms. They are again and again ascribed to David, and they must be his, or the New Testament is unreliable—the "cunningly-devised fable" it is expressly asserted not to be. So also with the latter part of Isaiah, and Daniel, for whom no place can be found, modern critics joining "veiled" Jews in casting him out. The Lord God of the Holy Prophets when on earth had a place for him among those prophets, and honoured him by public acknowledgment (Matt. xxiv. 15). Professor Smith asserts "blunders" in Samuel, "inventions" in Job and Jonah, "fictions" in Esther, but makes no attempt to demonstrate them. The Bible declares "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God."

The truth is, the Bible is one complete congruous whole, its parts so interlaced and inter-dependent that they must stand or fall together, and "the Book" must be accepted or rejected as such.

And what is the evidence offered on which we are to reject the Word of God? That of a few modern writers whose disagreement has been shown, and is notorious; whose influence is already passing away; who reason from a foregone conclusion, making everything bow to their preconceived notion that the Supernatural is the Impossible; and as a necessary consequence, there can be, and is, no God.

From the path that led the unhappy Strauss into this blank but logically-following Atheism, may He who died for us deliver us all for His Name sake.



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